
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	454 Ridge Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	October 31, 2019	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	19-595	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision
		<input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology

The applicant, owner Julia Rose Shepherd, seeks concept review for a new two- and three-story brick rowhouse and three-story accessory building at 454 Ridge St NW which is currently a vacant lot in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Drawings were prepared by Emotive Architecture PLC.

Property Description and Context

The street is characterized by modest, two-story flat-fronted frame and brick houses, rare survivors of what were once typical and fairly common 19th century working class alley dwellings. The street contains historic houses built from 1855 to 1911, generally individually or in small groups of two or three. They have a notable consistency of simple block forms, punched windows, and spare detailing. Some pairs of frame houses still exhibit a shared passage through to their rear yards, a not uncommon feature of pre-1870 residential houses. There is no alley behind this lot and it abuts directly against the M Street lots to the south. The only alley in this square is the small T-shaped alley at mid-block several houses over to the east. The Board has approved a number of new houses on Ridge Street that are two stories in the front and three stories at the back, including 446-452 Ridge Street (2015) and 460-462 Ridge Street (2012).¹

Proposal

A rowhouse two stories at the front and three stories at the back is proposed for the front of the lot, and a three-story accessory building is proposed near the rear of the lot. The flat front façade of the main house is brick with occasional coursing, soldier headers at window and door openings, and a corbeled cornice. Fenestration is arranged in three bays with a door for the front unit and a gated passage for the rear unit.

The rear of the house includes a third floor with a roof ridge set back 21 feet from the front façade. Forward of the third floor is a sloped roof over interior stairs and a small open area intended for use as a roof deck. The cornice of the front façade acts as a four-foot tall parapet in relation to this roof deck.

The three-story accessory building is setback from the rear property line 16 feet. Like the rear façade of main house, the accessory building is clad in a collage of contemporary materials

¹ HPA #15-061 and HPA #12-210

including brick, smooth panels, and vertical board and batten panels. Zoning relief is required for the height of the proposed accessory building.

Evaluation

The concept viewed from the Ridge Street right-of-way would be substantially compatible with the scale, materials and rhythm of this part of the historic district. Like previously approved concepts on this block it concentrates otherwise incompatible height and materials to the rear of the site where they will not be substantially visible. The sight-line study from directly in front of the house shows that there is little margin for error during construction to assure that the third floor is not visible above the front façade. From the east the third story will offer a slightly visible non-historic building profile, but it will be sufficiently distant from the street and essentially duplicates a pre-existing condition at 446-452 Ridge Street.

The roof deck proposed for the front of the house would generate furniture, structures and visible features of occupation contrary to the historic building forms of the street which cannot accommodate such use.

If the concept design is approved, it should be conditioned, including that: the third floor will not be visible above the front façade, front windows be double-hung sash instead of casement, the front façade brick be red instead of black, the fenestration be adjusted to be symmetrical and equally spaced, the gated passage come in from the edge of the façade and be spaced like the front door, and that all brick coursing and corbelling should be executed as shown without substitution or omission.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept for a two- and three-story rowhouse and a three-story accessory building at 454 Ridge Street NW to be compatible with the character of the historic district, consistent with the purpose of the preservation act, and that it be delegated to Staff final approval.